

Jakarta,  
Sept. 26, 1981

Dear Ms. Pinkerton,

I received your two letters which I will answer.

It seems that my reference to 'six worlds' needs an explanation. The Buddha said (Saṃyutta Nikāya IV, Ch 4, par. 84) when Ānanda asked him what the world is:

What is transitory by nature, Ānanda, is called the world in the ariyan sense. And what, Ānanda, is transitory by nature? The eye... visual objects... the ear... sound... the tongue... taste... the nose... smell... the body... tangibles... the mind... mind-objects... mind-contact... whatever pleasant or unpleasant or neutral feeling which arises owing to mind-contact... that also is transitory by nature. What is thus transitory, Ānanda, is called the world in the ariyan sense.

Frequently dots are used to substitute words which are already repeated over and over again. The contact and feelings arising through each of the six doors also should be in the text. As to the next sutta, the same is said about 'void of the self': the world is void of the self. In Par. 82, it is said of the world: 'It crumbles away' and now it is clearer. There is only one moment of seeing and it experiences what is visible and then it falls away. The world through the eyes is extremely short. The same is the case with the other 'worlds', just for a moment and then gone. We attach so much importance to what we experience, but : there are only objects which are, one at a time, experienced through one of the six doors. Thus, everything falls apart, crumbles away. Nothing left. Not so important anymore. Only nāma and rūpa which arise and then fall away immediately. Six worlds.

When you speak to someone what is really there? The sound which is heard is not the same as what is experienced through the eyes, and the moments of thinking of concepts, such as understanding the meaning of the words or recognizing a person are different again.

It seems from your letter that you think that remembering the shopping list is sati, but this is not so. How do we know there is sati? Sati is aware of an object, of a reality, one at a time, through one of the six doors. Usually we think of concepts, say, the beautiful mountains. We pay attention to details, to shape and form, to the purple colour. When sati arises, just for a short moment, it can be non-forgetful, aware, of just what appears through eyes, visible object, only that, or of the experience of visible object, which is seeing, only that. No mountain in the visible object, not something or somebody in visible object. No self in the seeing. Or when there is sound appearing, sati may

be non-forgetful (usually there is forgetfulness!) of the characteristic of just what appears through the ears, no traffic in the sound, no thing in it, no person in it. Or of the experience of sound. The experience is different from sound which does not know anything. Each reality has its own characteristic. The aim is not to have a lot of sati, but to have less attachment to the self. If there is attachment to sati and 'self who has sati' instead of a lessening of it one is on the wrong way. If one tries to concentrate or to exercise oneself through each of the six doors, there is already attachment.

In the beginning we all think that we know what sati is, that we can experience sati, that nama and rupa are so clear. It took me a few trips to India with Dhamma discussions to see what I do not know, to see that I was deluding myself. We all do that, but if one does not see it, one may go on the wrong way for a long time. Through Dhamma one becomes more and more honest with oneself. If we think we can experience sati, it is only thinking, and thinking with attachment. Don't we just now take seeing and visible object as a 'whole', instead of being able to know their different characteristics one at a time? If we still do that, there is no sati of one characteristic at a time, and we also cannot say that we know clearly what sati is. There can be a vague notion of what sati is, but we have to be careful not to take an idea about sati for sati. Thinking about eyebase and visible object which impinges on it is not sati. It is thinking, only a kind of nama which thinks and then gone. The more we realize how little we know and how difficult the development of wisdom is, the less will we delude ourselves and that is a good beginning. Sati will arise when we do not plan for it or try to 'exercise' the six doors. It is good to have intellectual understanding first of what the object of sati is. Awareness is always awareness of something, of an object, of one object at a time, through one doorway at a time. No mixing of the different doorways.

So, sati is not the same as remembering shopping-lists. If we forget something it means, we do not think of the concept we wanted to think of but think of another object. If I go to the market and buy carrots, and forget the lettuce because I was thinking of tomatoes and my attention turned to the tomatoes, we say in conventional language that I forgot something. But all the time there was citta and it was accompanied by saññā which performed its function of 'tagging' the object. It depends on conditions what is remembered at a certain moment, and it does not always turn out the way we want it, but that is not important.

3.

It does not matter which reality arises, they all arise because of conditions. It seems you find akusala citta annoying, but it is only a kind of nāma, arising because of conditions, and it has a characteristic. Its characteristic can be known.

You wonder whether there is 'chance' in your life. Shall we say, just different types of conditions? There are many habits and tendencies we also had in the past and which are 'accumulated' and play their part in the present life. Then there is kamma which produces the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and the experience of tangibles in the present life, not the thinking. Thinking is done with either kusala citta or akusala citta. When we meet someone there is just seeing, that is vipāka, then there can be thinking, that is not vipāka. There is hearing, that is vipāka. Thinking about the words <sup>we hear</sup> (is not vipāka). When we say it is due to kamma that I am able to hear the Dhamma, it is so. But we have to know that each situation consists of many different moments which are all different and arise because of different types of conditions. The fact that you were open to the Dhamma is due to tendencies in the past, kusala citta in the past which has been accumulated.

I see from your letters a great preoccupation with demons, ghosts, heavenly beings and this is conditioned by some events in your life. We know there are other planes of existence, beings who live there and who also can develop right understanding in some of the other planes, it cannot be denied. On the other hand, we should not forget that we cannot really depend on others, only on 'ourselves', that is, the development of right understanding at this moment. If we get too absorbed in our thoughts about other beings it distracts from the present moment. I know, the temptation is there. Whole Indonesia is full of stories about people who died and came back (even someone went out with his girlfriend for a whole day, the day after he died).

← I am attached to such stories, it is interesting news. Let us realize that there is attachment, arisen because of conditions. But what is the most helpful in life? Knowing this moment, knowing the six worlds, only that. Nobody else can do that for us.

And here resolution comes in: what is the most important in life? What is our goal? If we are sure of that there will be more resolution to develop right understanding now... even if there are many moments we are drifting off. The 'floating along' I quoted from Alan's letter is: one is distracted from the goal and finds other distractions more important and forgets to develop right understanding. But even when following one's distractions there can be mindfulness, sometimes, not often. Even sometimes is useful.

You speak about appreciating beauty as being kusala. No, it is attachment: you like something beautiful. But appreciating inner beauty is kusala, although there can also be attachment. It always pops up with mettā, nāna.